

From the war to the Reformation: recovery within limits

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The seven decades between the peace of 1450 and the beginning of Zwingli's ministry at the Grossmünster in 1519 were a period of recovery within limits. The city rebuilt its routes and its institutions, but it did not regain the commercial dynamism of the silk era. On the Gotthard side, the organisation of the route via Horgen was consolidated. The HLS dates the Horgen Sust to 1452, the oldest timbers of the present building date from the late 1470s, and the carriers' ordinance for the Hirzel followed in 1482.¹ On the eastern side, the shipping ordinance of 1498 regulated freight traffic on the Linth and the Walensee jointly with Schwyz and Glarus.² To the south, the Milanese capitulations of 1467, 1477, 1483, 1496 and 1498 renewed the toll freedom of Confederate merchants in the duchy.³ In the north, the Swabian War of 1499 and the effective separation of the Confederation from the Empire damaged the business of the Upper German trading houses in the Swiss area, including that of the Ravensburg Company.⁴

Downstream, the picture was one of contraction. The limitation of the Niederwasser masters to sixteen in 1461 and to eight in 1509 speaks for itself.⁵ The population of the city stagnated at around five thousand.⁶ The HLS article on the city observes that innovations took place mainly outside the sectors regulated by the guilds, while the corporate interests of the merchant oligarchy dominated. This observation is important for the whole later history of Zurich's economy. The guild constitution protected the existing trades, including the transport trades, and made the formation of large trading companies difficult. New activities therefore tended to grow in the interstices of the system or outside the city walls, in the countryside and later in the putting-out industries.

Politically, however, the city's position within the Confederation grew stronger. By the end of the fifteenth century Zurich had assembled a

territory that corresponded essentially to the later canton. From the sixteenth century onwards it acted as the leading canton, the *Vorort*, of the Confederation.⁷ The loss of the eastern corridor to Schwyz and Glarus was compensated by a secure place in a political system that controlled, collectively, nearly all the Alpine transit routes between the Rhine and Lombardy. What Zurich could not achieve alone in 1436, it achieved as a member of the Confederation: access to the passes on stable and negotiated terms.

The Reformation, which began in Zurich in 1519, would transform the city's relationship with the old pilgrim trade to Einsiedeln, with the Fraumünster and its regalian rights, and with the mercenary service that underpinned the Milanese capitulations. Those developments belong to Part B. For the present chapter it suffices to note that the institutions described here all survived the Reformation: the boatmen's guild, the Susten, the Kornhaus, the toll administration, the Zurich pound and the network of treaties with the neighbours. They formed part of the infrastructure on which the early modern commercial revival, beginning with the Locarnese silk merchants of 1555, would build.⁸

1 Notes

1. Ziegler, "Zürichsee", HLS (as above); "Ortsmuseum Sust", German Wikipedia (as above); Stadler, "Säumerei", HLS (as above). ↩
2. "Linth (Fluss)", HLS (as above). ↩
3. Glauser, "Mailänder Kapitulat", HLS (as above). ↩
4. Landolt, "Ravensburg, Compagnie de", HLS (as above). ↩
5. Illi, "Limmat", HLS (as above). ↩
6. Schultheiss, "Zürich (Gemeinde)", HLS (as above), population table: about 4,750 in 1467 and about 5,100 in 1529. ↩
7. Suter, "Zürich (Kanton)", HLS (as above): "Vom 16. bis 18. Jahrhundert und alternierend 1803–1848 war Zürich Vorort der Eidgenossenschaft." ↩

8. Mottu-Weber, “Soie”, DHS/HLS (French version, as above), on the arrival of refugee silk merchants from Locarno from 1555; “Als Zürich im späten Mittelalter noch Hafenstadt ...”, NZZ (as above), on the reception of the Locarnese refugees on 12 May 1555. ↩

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